

**Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
Commemoration of the Thomasites' Arrival
Saturday, August 21, 2010**

Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat. It is a great honor to be here to commemorate what is one of the major events in the shared history of the United States and the Philippines. *Ito po ay ang pagdating ng mga Thomasites sa Pilipinas noong Agosto 1901* (I refer to the arrival of the Thomasites in August 1901). I am proud of what the Thomasites accomplished in the Philippines, and I am also proud to share their name!

The arrival of the Thomasites marked a special relationship that would span decades of cooperation and friendship between our two countries. The Thomasites laid the groundwork for the establishment of a national education system in the Philippines. They did not just teach English, but also agriculture, trade courses, and even athletics. The Thomasites probably even played a little basketball. They also set up Teachers' Camp in Baguio, and one of the country's premier teacher training colleges, the Philippine Normal University, in Mayor Lim's home town of Manila.

We have all been blessed with that one great teacher who opened our eyes to a new path. I come from a family that includes great educators, and I know the love and commitment they bring to their work. I like to think the Thomasites brought the same passion to their work here. I hope that by the time most of them left their students were awake to a new world of opportunities made possible by the gift of a good education.

Today, 109 years after the first volunteers sailed across the seas on the USS Thomas and arrived on Philippine shores, their spirit lives on. Today's Thomasites are U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, and 145 of them are due to arrive today – by plane this time around. They will soon be deployed nationwide to help in local communities. Some 83 of them can be considered as

direct descendants of the Thomasites, *kasi lahat sila ay magta trabaho sa* education (because all of them will be working in the education sector).

Filipinos value education, oftentimes sacrificing life's comforts so that their children can go to school. But the Philippines faces daunting challenges in this regard. Both President Aquino and Secretary of Education Luistro have talked about the need to remedy classroom and teacher shortages, and about the need to reform the curriculum. They have pledged to address these problems head-on.

The United States Government continues its long-standing support of the Philippine education system and will support the initiatives of the Philippine Government in this and other areas. Each year, the United States provides around 700 million pesos for Philippine education, touching tens of thousands of children across the country.

I know that local governments like Mayor Lim's in Manila have provided significant support for education, including free college education and day care centers, and I commend him and others like him. At the national level, President Aquino is focusing on public-private partnerships, while the Department of Education has been harnessing the spirit of corporate social responsibility. Every year, corporations contribute hundreds of millions of pesos to help educate Filipinos through the innovative Adopt-a-School Program.

While education was the Thomasites' focus, friendship was their enduring legacy. Filipinos opened their hearts to the American teachers, just as they open their hearts to our Peace Corps volunteers today. Those friendships, carried on through generations, are the foundation of the U.S. Philippines relationship. I am proud to be a part of that tradition, and promise to do my part to make it even stronger.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay!